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USE OF THE ILLINOIS TEST OF PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ABILITIES AS A READINESS MEASURE.

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THE ILLINOIS TEST OF PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ABILITIES, A TEST DESIGNED FOR CHILDREN AGED 3-9, IS OF VALUE TO THE KINDERGARTEN OR FIRST-GRADE TEACHER IN DIAGNOSING FOR THE PURPOSE OF REMEDIATION, ESPECIALLY IN COMMUNITIES WHERE DISADVANTAGED AREAS EXIST. FROM ITS USE, THE TEACHER CAN DETERMINE BACKGROUND INADEQUACIES, DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE LEVEL OF A CHILD'S IDEAS AND HIS ABILITY TO EXPRESS THEM, DEVIATIONS IN AUDITORY AND VISUAL ABILITIES, DEGREES OF SELF-CONFIDENCE IN LANGUAGE USAGE, DIFFERENCES IN HEARING AND SPEAKING VOCABULARIES, AND ARTICULATION PROBLEMS. TEST RESULTS ALLOW THE TEACHER TO CREATE PROGRAMS THAT DEVELOP READING READINESS ON THE BASIS OF INDIVIDUAL NEEDS. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (BOSTON, APRIL 24-27, 1968). (BS)

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RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND READING

The relationships between language abilities and reading achievement are generally accepted on the basis of much research. Harris (4) in describing the beginning stages of reading, indicates that "learning to read means that queer looking marks stand for speech . . . . the discovery that printed words talk is the first step in learning to

read." Anderson and Dearborn (1) emphasize that response to the spoken language comes first; the child then learns to say the words himself, then learns to read. Reading becomes a controlled way of talking "in which the words on the page are substituted for the visual stimuli of speech." Monroe and Rogers (11) note that "the written form is only the transcription of the spoken language."

Loban (8) found positive interrelationships among all the language arts. Ruddell (14), focusing on patterns of language stated that "reading comprehension is a function of the similarity of patterns of language structure in the reading material and oral patterns of language structure used by children." Simpson (15) correlated vocabulary and oral language samples of two and half year olds to their reading achievement at age eight, finding coefficients of .67 and .53 respectively. deHirsch (2) found that failing readers showed more numerous and severe deficits in both the expressive and receptive aspects of language than did a group of superior achievers.

Concern about the reading problems of children from homes of lower socioeconomic levels has emphasized the importance of a strong language background (9;13). Measures for determining language ability, however, have generally been informal in nature (11). A relatively recent experimental test, the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities, presently under revision, may have some potential in measuring the language development of school beginners.

ILLINOIS TEST OF PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ABILITIES

In describing the ITPA, Osgood and Miron (12) state that it was designed specifically for children ages three to nine years, the "critical period of language growth in children, from the onset of true language to the development of near adult ability." The authors, Kirk and McCarthy (6), concerned with the language development of exceptional children especially those of preschool age, devised a diagnostic instrument for the purpose of arriving at remediation. Based on Osgood's (7) theoretical psycholinguistics model, the ITPA was revised three times before being published as an experimental test in 1961.

Three dimensions are used to specify a psycholinguistic ability: levels of organization, psycholinguistic processes, and channels of communication. Levels of organization refer to functional complexity and two levels are identified: the representational level involving the understanding of linguistic symbols and the automatic-sequential level involving language habits where little thought is involved. Psycholinguistics processes include: decoding, the ability to get meaning from auditory and visual stimuli; encoding, the habits necessary to express oneself in words and gestures; association, the habits necessary to handle linguistic symbols internally. Channels of communication are concerned with the modes of reception and response.

Nine psycholinguistic abilities are measured in the present edition (7). Measures are included to determine the following:

Test 1 - ability to comprehend spoken words

Test 2 - ability to comprehend pictures and written words

Test 3 - ability to relate spoken words meaningfully

Test 4 - ability to relate pictures or objects meaningfully

Test 5 - ability to verbally describe objects

Test 6 - ability to express ideas through gestures

Test 7 - ability to use appropriate inflected endings

Test 8 - ability to repeat correctly a sequence of digits

Test 9 - ability to reproduce the order of sequence of pictures or geometric designs

Existing data on studies with the ITPA are largely statistical, remediation or language disorders. In relation to reading Kass (5) found primary grade reading disabilities weak in seven of the eight abilities measured at the automatic-sequential level of language usage and in only one of the representational level abilities. The author concluded that weaknesses existed in integrative functions: closure, sequential memory, and rate of recognition. McCleod (10) notes that subtests measuring non-meaningful automatic perceptual abilities seem to be most closely related to reading. The focus on these automatic perceptual abilities as they relate to reading and the implications for remediation are, according to McLeod, the most significant contributions of the ITPA. However, Gibb and Rierson (3) relating four ITPA subtest results to reading readiness test totals concluded that the ability to relate symbols meaningfully was closely related to reading.

Automatic usage of accumulated grammatical skills were also significantly related.

The writer (16), in a study of first graders, found that achieving readers located on both informal and standardized tests, tended to score higher on tests of auditory-vocal association and sequencing; visual decoding abilities were also higher than auditory decoding abilities. The coefficient between the total scores on the ITPA and the Gates Primary Paragraph Reading Test was .78 indicating a fairly high relationship for group performance on a standardized test. Analysis made for individuals, however, showed little relationship between total scores on the ITPA and instructional levels found on an informal reading inventory. The Visual Decoding test, a measure requiring the subject to select from a set of pictures the one picture which is meaningfully related, resulted in significantly higher scores for achieving readers than for non-achievers. This was true also of the Auditory-Vocal Association measure which requires the use of verbal analogies. Significant differences were not evident in individual achieving and non-achieving readers' performances on tests using auditory or visual stimuli, requiring motor or vocal responses, and those requiring automatic or association type thought processes. Non-achieving readers on individual total test results and on group total subtest results tended to produce more negative scores and these deviations tended to be larger than those of the achieving readers. As a group predictor of reading achievement the ITPA was slightly better than the Leo-Clark Readiness Test and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale

for Children. Achieving readers' group means were higher on the test total and on each of the subtests.

In a later study of 115 first graders, the writer (17) found that successful readers, as a group, scored higher than non-achievers on the subtests Visual Decoding and Auditory-Vocal Association but the differences were not significant.

In view of the research to date, the usefulness of the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities as a predictive measure may be questioned. However, if the original intent of the authors is considered, that of diagnosis for the purpose of remediation, the ITPA assumes great value, especially in those communities where disadvantaged areas exist. Specifically, what can be determined about a child's language understanding and usage other than how the child ranks with the standardization population? Through the Auditory-Vocal Automatic Test, one can determine a child's capabilities in using plurals, verb tenses and comparative terminology. From the Auditory-Vocal Sequencing test, a child's auditory memory, his ability to recall the order of numbers heard, can be determined. Through the Visual-Motor Sequencing test, one can evaluate a child's visual memory of the order of a progressively longer series of pictures or geometric designs. In the measure of Visual Decoding, a child's ability to note specific details in classifying an item is evident. His background of experience with the pictured objects is actually measured. On the measure of Auditory Decoding, one can determine the quality of a child's vocabulary as well as his vocabulary level. The measure of Auditory-Vocal Association

assesses a child's understanding of relationships among words, his concept development and the extent of his vocabulary. Through the Visual-Motor Association test one can further assess concept development as the child classifies objects or pictures on a meaningful basis. The test of Vocal Encoding shows the quality and extent of a child's vocabulary and mastery of sentence structure as well as the ease with which the subject uses oral language. A child's ability to express his ideas through gestures can be analyzed and concepts evaluated on the Motor Encoding measure. Throughout the entire test, background inadequacies can be detected; differences between the level of a child's ideas and his ability to express those ideas can be ascertained; deviations in auditory and visual abilities can be located; self-confidence in language usage, or lack of it, can be evaluated; differences in hearing and speaking vocabularies can be assessed; articulation problems are evident.

IMPLICATIONS

Results of individual scores on the ITPA have practical implications for the kindergarten or first grade teacher. A program for developing readiness for reading can be planned to provide for individual needs. Field trips and other language related activities can be organized to alleviate the areas of weakness and use to advantage the areas of strength. Practice in interpreting oral language or pictures becomes more individualized, more directed, as teachers apply their knowledge of individual differences to the group situation. Development of visual terms, abilities to compare and contrast, and sensi-

tivity to specific qualities or details focuses on individual needs. Establishment of associations of meanings to words through wider experiences, too, assumes an individual direction. As stated by Monroe and Rogers (11:26) "Alert teachers working daily with young children develop a remarkable sensitivity to the language background and potential of each pupil. But even experienced teachers frequently find it difficult to identify and describe the specific strands or aspects of language skill which together make up the individual child's language power." (11)

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